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SUBJECT: FREETOWN EAC REVIEWS SECURITY IN LIGHT OF RISING
COMMODITY PRICES AND UPCOMING LOCAL ELECTIONS

REF: (A) FREETOWN 198 (B) FREETOWN 196

¶1. On April 29, 2008, the Ambassador chaired Embassy Freetown's Emergency Action Committee (EAC) to review the security situation surrounding the rising food and fuel prices in Sierra Leone and the affect on the population. The potential for unrest is compounded by political tensions preparatory to the scheduled July local elections. EAC participants included the AMB, DCM, MGT, USAID, RSO, ARSO, CONS, POL, PAO, DLO, and the CLO.

¶2. The EAC members reviewed the current situation of rising food and fuel prices. To date, there have been no known incidents related to the increase of cost for these two commodities. The Ambassador reports that during the April 28th Independence Day comments, President Koroma expressed his hope that such incidents would not occur in Sierra Leone.

As reported reftel, Sierra Leoneans have been directly affected by the escalation in prices, but have remained calm.

The Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL) has routinely updated the civilian population on the current conditions and continues to emphasize that this dilemma is not exclusive to Sierra Leone, but is a global problem. This sensitization by the GOSL, thus far, has proven to be effective in suppressing public panic and unrest.

¶3. The RSO also briefed EAC members on the current security environment preparatory to the planned July 5 local elections. Although public reaction has been calm regarding the price increases for food and fuel items, political tensions have provoked skirmishes. The RSO reported that since February 12, 2008 there have been 12 incidents of political intolerance reported throughout Sierra Leone. These incidents were short-lived and isolated, but could foreshadow a contentious local election. In addition, tensions such as those arising from the recent incident in Kono (ref A) highlight the need to be alert. Rising prices and the onset of the rainy season are likely to bring about an upswing on petty crime as well.

¶4. The RSO also briefed the EAC on the Embassy emergency preparedness plans. All present agreed that the current security posture is adequate under the existing conditions. The Consular Officer also noted that a new warden alert system designed to disseminate information rapidly via cell phone SMS (text message) will be tested in the next few days.

¶5. Post will continue to closely monitor these situations.

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